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Spain Becomes a Tempting Market for Imported Terror

By EDWARD SCHUMACHER

MADRID — When a group calling itself Islamic Jihad said it was responsible for a bomb that killed 18 people in a restaurant near an American air base here this month, Spaniards took it as a sign that their country had indeed become part of Western Europe: international terrorism had arrived.

But the message received by Western intelligence agencies was even more worrisome. The bombing could signal the first instance of new anti-American violence moving onto the Continent. "You've got a climate in Europe in which Americans are fair game," said a diplomat. There was no hard proof, Spanish police conceded, that the homemade bomb set off in a barbecue restaurant frequented by airmen from Torrejon Air Force Base had been placed there by the amorphous group that claimed it. Jihad means holy war; suicide commandos using that name have carried out car bombings against American and Israeli facilities in Lebanon. Spanish officials accepted the Arab claim as true because, they said, the bombing did not fit the pattern of Spain's own terrorists. Basque separatists such as E.T.A. and radical leftists known as Grapo have not tried to kill Americans. Nor are they known to have links with the small bands of extremists that have attacked NATO installations in Europe.

People who telephoned the Associated Press in Beirut said the Madrid explosion was in retaliation for a car bomb on March 8 that killed 75 people near a Shiite mosque in Beirut. Some Moslems had blamed the Beirut explosion on Americans.

None of the Americans eating in the Madrid restaurant on the night of the bombing was killed and only one American was wounded. Concern that the bombing could be the beginning of a European campaign was fueled by a threat in Lebanon attributed to Abu Nidal, the head of a radical Palestinian faction. He reportedly said in January that his group would attack American and Israeli interests in Europe, mentioning Spain. Reports have also been circulating among Western intelligence

agencies of Iranians being trained for attacks in Europe. And last month, the Libyan leader, Muammar el-Qaddafi, announced that a "pan-Arab commando" had been formed and would cooperate closely with revolutionary groups in Europe. Until now, radical Arab groups have usually directed their attacks in Europe against other Arabs and, occasionally, Israelis.

An Israeli Warning

For Spain, the Madrid bomb blew away the last shreds of what had long been considered a special immunity to Middle Eastern problems. Spain does not formally recognize Israel and, with its Moorish heritage, has always claimed special ties to the Arabs. But now it is moving toward integration with the West. Last month, it reached agreement on becoming a member of the European Economic Community. Prime Minister Felipe González is pushing to clarify Spain's uncertain status inside NATO. He is also backing support for NATO membership in a national referendum to be held early next year. President Reagan will arrive in Spain on May 6 for the first American Presidential visit in nearly 30 years.

A quiet visit last week by the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, David Kimche, underlined Mr. González's announced intention to recognize Israel soon. The Government says it is waiting for the right moment, although some Arab diplomats say the move is inevitable

and that Spain is being needlessly cautious. Arab violence reached Spain last year, when two Saudis were assassinated and a Lebanese diplomat was wounded in separate attacks that were also claimed by Islamic Jihad. A Libyan diplomat was also wounded, but responsibility was taken by Libyans opposed to Mr. Qaddafi.

Israelis have warned that Spain is a staging ground for Arab terrorism. An estimated 40,000 to 70,000 Arabs and Iranians live here. Spanish intelligence officials, preoccupied with local radical groups, admit to having little inside knowledge of the Middle Easterners. Part of the problem is that Spain, which relies heavily on tourism, has some of the world's most liberal visa laws. Even during the Franco dictatorship, foreigners had easy access. But now the Government is moving to tighten up procedures. Last year, it ended automatic political asylum for Iranians. According to Western, Spanish and Arab diplomats, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader, has sent many agents to Spain.

The Government also passed a tougher antiterrorism law, which took effect in January. It permits the police to hold suspected terrorists incommunicado for 10 days and to shut down publications and broadcasting facilities supporting them. Basques, Catalans from southeastern Spain and far-leftists have angrily protested the law as discriminatory. A Government ombudsman has rejected a petition to go directly to Spain's highest court for a ruling on the constitutionality of the law.